

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
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CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD AND AMBASSADOR WHITEHOUSE

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, TH
SUBJECT: CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT IN THAILAND: DEVELOPMENTS
AND PROSPECTS

REF: BANGKOK 30105 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY: NOW THAT THE EVENTS SURROUNDING THE OVERTHROW
OF THE THANIN CABINET ON OCT 20 HAVE FADED INTO THE
BACKGROUND AND NEW GOVERNMENTAL ENTITIES HAVE BEEN
ESTABLISHED IN THAILAND, THE ENTIRE COMPLEX OF EVENTS
MAY BEST BE SEEN AS A SERIES OF VARIATIONS ON THE THEMES
OF CONTINUITY AND CHANGE. IN TERMS OF CONTINUITY, THE
MAJOR THAI INSTITUTIONS OF NATION, KING, AND BUDDHISM
NOT ONLY HAVE NOT BEEN CHANGED BUT HAVE NOT BEEN
CHALLENGED AT ALL. MOREOVER, THE MAIN LINES OF THAI
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DOMESTIC AND EXTERNAL POLICY ARE UNLIKELY TO BE CHANGED
IN ANY SUBSTANTIAL WAY BY THE NEW GOVERNMENT, THOUGH
THERE WILL BE SIGNIFICANT MODIFICATIONS IN EMPHASIS AND
STYLE, AS NOTED BELOW. THE NEW CABINET IS IN OFFICE
UNDER AN INTERIM CONSTITUTION, PENDING ENACTMENT OF A
PERMANENT CONSTITUTION. PRIME MINISTER KRIANGSAK HAS
SPOLEN SPECIFICALLY OF HIS CABINET AS A BODY IN OFFICE

FOR A SHORT TERM. HOWEVER, HE HAS ALSO UNDERLINED THE NEED TO MOVE QUICKLY ON A RANGE OF SECURITY, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND NARCOTICS PROBLEMS. END SUMMARY.

1. BACKGROUND: IN THE LARGEST SENSE, THE THANIN CABINET, WITHOUT A POLITICAL BASE OF ITS OWN AND LED BY A PRIME MINISTER WHO SEEMED UNINTERESTED IN BUILDING ONE, WAS NOT A GOOD BET FOR A PROLONGED PERIOD IN POWER. APPOINTED ON OCT 22, 1976, THE THANIN CABINET WAS THE TARGET OF NUMEROUS PREDICTIONS OF ITS IMMINENT REPLACEMENT, BEGINNING IN JANUARY, 1977. IT SURVIVED AN ABORTIVE COUP D'ETAT ON MARCH 26, 1977, LED BY THE LATE GEN CHALAT HIRANYASIRI. HOWEVER, ITS FUNDAMENTAL WEAKNESS WAS UNDERLINED BY THIS ABORTIVE COUP, WHICH WAS AIMED AT THE MILITARY GROUP THAT PLACED PRIME MINISTER THANIN IN POWER, RATHER THAN AT THE THANIN CABINET ITSELF. THE THANIN CABINET SURVIVED ANOTHER CHALLENGE IN EARLY JUNE, WHEN A GROUP OF FIELD GRADE OFFICERS URGED ARMY COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SOEM NA NAKHON TO DISMISS THE CABINET. THE FIELD GRADE OFFICERS HAD NO ALTERNATIVE CABINET TO PROPOSE, AND THEIR REQUEST WAS POLITELY SET ASIDE.

2. AT SOME POINT --PROBABLY AROUND APRIL OR MAY, 1977 -- THE DORMANT POLITICAL AMBITIONS OF GEN KRIANGSAK CHAMANAN BECAME FULLY AWAKE, AND IT WAS CLEAR THAT
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KRIANGSAK SAW HIMSELF AS A MUCH MORE CAPABLE PRIME MINISTER THAN THANIN WOULD EVER BE. BY HIS CAREFUL CULTIVATION OF THAILAND'S RESTIVE LABOR UNIONS, BEGINNING IN OCTOBER, 1976, AND THROUGH HIS GROWING AND ALMOST PUBLIC CRITICISM OF THANIN TO THAI AND FOREIGN VISITORS, KRIANGSAK STEADILY MOVED TO ESTABLISH HIMSELF AS THE LOGICAL SUCCESSOR TO THANIN. KRIANGSAK MAY HAVE HOPED THAT THANIN, SEEING THE MINISCULE BASE OF HIS SUPPORT SHRINK ALMOST TO THE VANISHING POINT, WOULD FEEL COMPELLED TO RESIGN, LEAVING THE WAY OPEN FOR FORMATION OF A NEW CABINET UNDER KRIANGSAK, BUT THANIN SHOWED THE STUBBORN STREAK THAT HAS MARKED HIS PUBLIC PERSONALITY AND REFUSED TO RESIGN. MOREOVER, THE 1976 CONSTITUTION CONTAINED NO PROVISION FOR THE REPLACEMENT OF A PRIME MINISTER OR CABINET MINISTER. THIS LEFT KRIANGSAK AND HIS MILITARY SUPPORTERS WITH THE ALTERNATIVES OF CONTINUING WITH THANIN OR OF STAGING A "COUP AND DISMISSING CABINET, CONSTITUTION, AND OTHER INSTITUTIONS CREATED AFTER THE ORIGINAL COUP OF OCT, 1976.

3. THE EVENTS OF OCT 20, 1977, BROUGHT AN END TO THE THANIN CABINET AND LED TO THE ADOPTION OF A NEW, INTERIM

CONSTITUTION, A NEW LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY, AND THE APPOINTMENT OF THE CABINET OF PRIME MINISTER KRIANGSAK CHAMANAN. THE CABINET, COMPOSED OF 33 MEMBERS, IS THE LARGEST IN THAI HISTORY AND IS THE 42ND TO BE APPOINTED SINCE THE OVERTHROW OF THE ABSOLUTE MONARCHY IN 1932. ALTHOUGH THERE HAVE BEEN NUMEROUS THAI CABINETS OF RELATIVELY SHORT DURATION, THERE HAVE BEEN EXTENDED PERIODS OF CABINET STABILITY DURING THE PAST HALF CENTURY, AND THE NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS OF NATION, KING, AND BUDDHISM HAVE BEEN THE FOUNDATION OF THE THAI POLITY.

4. PRIME MINISTER KRIANGSAK HAS REFERRED TO HIS CABINET AS A SHORT-TERM BODY, PENDING THE DRAFTING OF A PERMANENT CONSTITUTION AND THE HOLDING OF GENERAL ELECTIONS. THE
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NEW CABINET IS COMPOSED OF EXPERIENCED FIGURES, RELATIVELY LIBERAL IN OUTLOOK, AND APPEARS TO HAVE THE CAPACITY TO ACT DECISIVELY ON THE DOMESTIC AND EXTERNAL PROBLEMS FACING THAILAND. PRIME MINISTER KRIANGSAK (WHO CONTINUES IN OFFICE AS SUPREME COMMANDER OF THE ROYAL THAI ARMED FORCES) BRINGS A REPUTATION FOR DRIVE AND ENERGY TO THIS OFFICE. HE HAS SPOKEN OF HIS DETERMINATION TO TAKE EARLY ACTION ON A RANGE OF SECURITY, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, AND NARCOTICS ISSUES.

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5. CONTINUITY: THE ELEMENTS OF CONTINUITY BETWEEN THE MILITARY-BACKED THANIN CABINET AND THE MILITARY-BACKED CRIANGSAK CABINET ARE CONSIDERABLE. THE MILITARY GROUP WHICH STAGED THE 1976 COUP ALSO STAGED THE 1977 COUP, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF MG ARUN THAWATHASIN, KILLED IN THE ABORTIVE COUNTER-COUP OF MARCH, 1977. THE CHAIRMAN OF THE NATIONAL POLICY COUNCIL, AS THE MILITARY GROUP IS NOW CALLED, IS ADM SA-NGAT CMALOYU, WHO WAS ALSO CHAIRMAN OF THE 1976 COUP GROUP. 208 OF THE 360 MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY APPOINTED BY THE KING, NOV 16, 1977, WERE ALSO MEMBERS OF THE "NATIONAL ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM ASSEMBLY" APPOINTED NOV 20, 1976. SO FAR, THERE ARE NO CHANGES IN THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES, BELOW THE MINISTERS THEMSELVES, AND NO CHANGES IN THE PATTERN AND PERSONALITIES OF PROVINCIAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT. IN A BROAD SENSE, THE COUP OF OCT 20, 1977, IS BEST SEEN AS THE DENOUNCEMENT OF A SPECIALIZED CABINET CRISIS, BUT NOT A CRISIS OF THE CONFIDENTIAL

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REGIME.

6. CHANGE: HOWEVER, THE CHANGES BROUGHT BY THE OCT 20 COUP ARE STRIKING ON THE SURFACE, AT LEAST, AND COULD BRING SIGNIFICANT CHANGES IN STYLE AND PRACTICE, IF NOT IN BROAD POLICIES:

A) A MORE POLITICAL APPROACH: THE KRIANGSAK GOVERNMENT BRINGS A MORE FRANKLY POLITICAL APPROACH TO THE PROBLEMS OF GOVERNMENT THAN THE THANIN CABINET. A DELIBERATE EFFORT IS BEING MADE TO BUILD SUPPORT FOR THE GOVERNMENT AMONG LABOR UNIONS, INTELLECTUALS AND ACADEMICS, AND AMONG STUDENTS. THE NATIONAL POLICY COUNCIL MET WITH LABOR LEADERS NOV 19 TO DISCUSS LABOR PROBLEMS, AND IT APPEARS LIKELY THAT THE NEW GOVERNMENT WILL PERMIT ESTABLISHMENT OF A CENTRAL LABOR COUNCIL. THIS WILL MEET A LONG-STANDING OBJECTIVE OF ORGANIZED THAI LABOR. ONE OF THE EARLY ACTIONS OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT WAS AN UNDERTAKING TO HOLD GENERAL ELECTIONS IN 1978, A PROMISE REPEATED IN THE CONSTITUTION PROCLAIMED ON NOV 9. THE CONSTITUTION MOLDS OPEN THE POSSIBILITY OF POSTPONING THE ELECTIONS UNTIL 120 DAYS INTO 1979 (I.E. BY APRIL 30). IF THE NEW NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY DOES NOT COMPLETE ACTION ON THE NEW, PERMANENT

CONSTITUTION, AND A DRAFT CONSTITUTION IS TO BE PREPARED BY THE CABINET. POLITICAL PARTIES REMAIN PROHIBITED, AND LEADERS OF THE FORMER PARTIES, WHO HAVE MAINTAINED CONTACT WITH THEIR COHORTS, ARE SKEPTICAL AS TO HOW FAR THE MILITARY GROUP IS PREPARED TO GO IN OPENING UP THE POLITICAL SYSTEM. HOWEVER, THE POLITICIANS ARE NOTABLY MORE OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE FUTURE THAN THEY WERE DURING THE THANIN PERIOD.

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B) A LIGHTER HAND WITH THE PRESS: ONE OF THE MAJOR SOURCES OF CRITICISM OF THE THANIN CABINET WAS ITS PRACTICE OF SUSPENDING NEWSPAPERS WHICH PUBLISHED ARTICLES OR COMMENT IT JUDGED UNSAFISFACTORY, FOR PERIODS OF FROM ONE OR TWO DAYS TO TWO WEEKS. SIXTEEN PERIODICALS WERE SO SUSPENEDED, SOME OF THEM ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS, BUT THE EXPERIENCE, FAR FROM CHASTENING THEM, SIMPLY WORSENEDED RELATIONS BETWEEN THE THANIN CABINET AND THE PRESS. THE NEW GOVERNMENT HAS URGED THE PRESS TO ACT RESPONSIBLY, AND THE PRESS HAS SEEN FIT NOT TO CHALLENGE THE GOVERNMENT AS YET ON THIS POINT. ALTHOUGH THAILAND HAS NOT HAD A LONG TRADITION OF PRESS FREEDOM, THE THAI PRESS HAS SHOWN ITSELF TO BE NOTABLY READY TO TEST ANY GOVERNMENT IN EXERCISING WHAT IT SEES AS ITS RIGHT TO PRINT WHAT IT CONSIDERS APPROPRIATE. IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN HOW THE NEW GOVERNMENT AND THE PRESS WILL GET ALONG, ONCE THE PRESS BEGINS TO PROBE THE LIMITS OF ITS NEW, BUT STILL QUALIFIED FREEDOM.

C) A LARGER, MORE EXPERIENCED CABINET: THE CABINET APPOINTED BY THE KING ON NOV 13 ON THE RECOMMENDATION OF THE PRIME MINISTER IS THE LARGEST IN THAI HISTORY, MUCH LARGER (33 MEMBERS) THAN ITS PREDECESSOR (18 MEMBERS). IT CONTAINS NINE SERVING OR RETIRED MILITARY OFFICERS, COMPARED TO THREE RETIRED MILITARY OFFICERS IN THE THANIN CABINET. MORE SIGNIFICANTLY, HOWEVER, IS THE APPOINTMENT OF EXPERIENCED FIGURES FROM PAST CABINETS AND FROM BUSINESS AND ACADEMIC LIFE TO MAJOR POSTS, IN A MANNER WHICH SHOULD BRING GREATER SUPPORT TO THE GOVERNMENT. IN THIS CATEGORY OF EXPERIENCED FIGURES ARE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER SUNTHON HONGLADARON (FORMER AMBASSADOR TO THE US AND LAST SECRETARY-GENERAL OF SEATO), DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER SOMPHOP MOTRAKIT (A DISTINGUISHED JURIST), MINISTER OF DEFENSE LEK NAEOMALI (A RESPECTED, RETIRED MILITARY FIGURE AND FORMER DEPUTY DEFENSE MINISTER), MINISTER OF

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS UPPADIT PACHARIYANGKUN (FOREIGN MINISTER IN THE THANIN CABINET AND A WELL-REGARDED, IF SELF-EFFACING DIPLOMAT), MINISTER OF JUSTICE SUTHAM PHATTHARAKHOM (CHIEF JUSTICE OF THE SUPREME COURT UNTIL HIS RETIREMENT ON SEPT 30, 1977), MINISTER OF EDUCATION BUNSOM MARTIN (A FORMER DIRECTOR OF THE DEPARTMENT OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN THE MINISTRY AND WELL-RESPECTED IN EDUCATIONAL CIRCLES), AND KASEM SUWANNAKUN (UNTIL HIS APPOINTMENT, RECTOR OF CHULALONGKON UNIVERSITY).

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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TEXT)

7. OF GREAT POTENTIAL SIGNIFICANCE IN THE ECONOMIC FIELD IS THE APPOINTMENT OF KASEM CHATIKAWANIT, FORMER DIRECTOR OF THE ELECTRICITY GENERATING AUTHORITY OF THAILAND, AS MINISTER OF INDUSTRY. ASEM IS ONE OF THE ABLEST MANAGERS IN THAILAND, AND HIS APPOINTMENT TO THIS POST MAY PROVIDE CONSIDERABLE PUSH TO THAILAND'S INDUSTRIALIZATION PROGRAM WHICH HAS FLAGGED IN RECENT YEARS. ALSO OF PARTICULAR NOTE IS THE APPOINTMENT OF LTG PREM TINSULANON AS DEPUTY MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR. PREM

HAD PUT IN AN EFFECTIVE PERFORMANCE AS COMMANDER OF THE SECOND ARMY, IN NORTHEAST THAILAND MAIN FOCUS OF THE COMMUNIST INSURGENCY. PREM IS KNOWN TO BE A STRONG SUPPORTER OF THE POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL APPROACH TO THE INSURGENCY, SUPPLEMENTING MILITARY AND POLICE SUPPRESSIVE OPERATIONS. HE HAS BEEN ASSIGNED SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITY FOR SECURITY AND THE RURAL DEVELOPMENT
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PROGRAM, WHIN THE MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR.

8. DIRECTION OF POLICY: IN A NATIONWIDE RADIO AND TV ADDRESS NOV 17 PRIME MINISTER KRIANGSAK SET OUT A 15-POINT PROGRAM (DETAILS IN REFTEL) FOR HIS GOVERNMENT, WHICH EMPHASIZES ACCELERATED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN BOTH URBAN AND RURAL AREAS; FRIENDSHIP WITH ALL COUNTRYMEN ON A RECIPROCAL BASIS, EMPHASIZING GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE INDOCHINESE COUNTRIES AND STRENGTHENED CONTACTS WITH THAILAND'S NEIGHBORS; IMPROVEMENT OF RELATIONS BETWEEN LABOR AND MANAGEMENT; PREPARATION FOR GENERAL ELECTIONS AS PROVIDED FOR IN THE 1971 CONSTITUTION; AND PROTECTION AND JUSTICE FOR STUDENTS WHO DEFECTED TO THE COMMUNISTS AFTER THE COUP OF OCT, 1976, AND WHO NOW WISH TO RETURN HOME.

9. OF PARTICULAR NOTE IN THE NOV 17 ADDRESS WAS KRIANGSAK'S STATEMENT THAT THE NARCOTICS TRAFFIC WOULD BE SUPPRESSED BY DIRECT AND INDIRECT ACTION, USING LEGAL ACTION, EDUCATION, MEDICAL TREATMENT, COOPERATION WITH OTHER GOVERNMENTS, AND CROP SUBSTITUTION TO ACHIEVE RESULTS. KRIANGSAK SAID, "THOSE WHO MANUFACTURE AND TRADE IN NARCOTICS SHOULD GIVE UP THEIR PRACTICES AND TURN TO HONEST MEANS OF LIVELIHOOD. THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICY IS TO SUPPRESS THE NARCOTICS BUSINESS WITH VIOLENT AND STERN MEASURES."

10. PROBLEM AREAS: ALTHOUGH THE REPLACEMENT OF THE THANIN CABINET HAS BEEN GENERALLY GREETED WITHIN THAILAND WITH RELIEF, THERE ARE MAJOR PROBLEM AREAS AHEAD, WHICH THE KRIANGSAK CABINET WILL HAVE AS MUCH DIFFICULTY IN RESOLVING AS DID ITS PREDECESSORS. IN ADDITION, THERE ARE CONTINUING SIGNS OF FACTIONALISM
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WITHIN THE MILITARY GROUP WHICH COULD CAUSE CONTINUING TENSION IF NOT ADDRESSED CAREFULLY BY KRIANGSAK.

-A) MILITARY FACTIONALISM: KRIANGSAK IS A SKILLED NEGOTIATOR AND MANIPULATOR BUT IS NOT RPT NOT THE ACCEPTED LEADER OF THE THAI MILITARY THAT PHIBUN,SARIT, AND THANOM WERE IN THEIR TIME. KRIANGSAK HAS TO DEAL WITH HIS MILITARY PEERS AND DOES NOT RPT NOT HAVE A FREE HAND IN HIS RELATIONS WITH THEM. THE NATIONAL POLICY COUNCIL, WHICH INCLUDES THE MILITARY LEADERS WHO CARRIED OUT BOTH THE 1976 AND 1977 COUPS, IS IMPOWERED BY THE INTERIM CONSITUION TO FORMULATE POLICY GUIDELINES FOR THE STATE AND GIVE ADVICE TO THE CABINET. THE KING CAN DISMISS THE PRIME MINISTER ON THE RECOMMENDATION OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE NATIOAL POLICY COUNCIL. KRIANGSAK HAS REFERRED PRIMVATELY TO THE PROCESS OF FORMATION OF HIS CABINET AS HVING BEEN PROTRACTED AND AGONIZING, A CLEAR REFERENCE TO THE FRANK EXPRESSION OF DIFFERENCE WITH HIM ON THE PART OF SOME MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL POLICY COUNCIL. KRIANGSAK IS SCHEDULED TO RETIRE FROM THE RTA ON SEPT 30, 1978, AND WILL THEREAFTER NO LONGER BE SUPREME COMMANDER OF THE THAI ARMED FORCES, AS HE IS NOW. HE IS REPORTEDLY CONCERNED OVER POTENTIAL CONFLICT WITH ADMIRAL SA-NGAT (HIMSELF A RETIRED SUPREME COMMANDER) AND WITH RTA DEPUTY COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF GEN YOT THEPHASADIN NA AYUTTHAYA, A TROOP COMMANDER WHO HAS CULTIVATED BATTALION COMMANDERS IN THE BANGKOK AREA WITH NOTABLE PERSEVERANCE.

B) A SOFT, FUN-LOVING SOCIETY AND A LETHARGIC CIVIL SERVICE: BOTH STAND IN THE WAY OF DOING MUCH WITH THE RELATIGELY LONG-TERM PROBLEMS TO WHICH PRIME MINISTER KRIANGSAK REFERRED IN HIS POLICY SPEECH OF NOV 17. THE KRIANGSAK CABINET IS EXPLICITLY SHORT-TERM AT PRESENT, BUT WE BELIEVE THAT KRIANGSAK SEES HIMSELF IN THE TOP GOVERNMENT POSITION FOR YEARS TO COME. HOWEVER, IT IS DOUBTFUL THAT THAI SOCIETY IS PREPARED TO MAKE THE NECES-SARY SACRIFICES OR THAT THE THAI BUREAUCRACY HAS THE DRIVE

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AND EFFICIENCY TO DEAL WITH THESE PROBLEMS.

C) A SLOWLY-GROWING INSURGENCY AND POTENTIALLY HOSTILE COMMUNIST NEIGHBORS : WHILE THE ISURGENCY IS NOT YET A MAJOR NATIONAL PROBLEM, IT CONTINUES TO GROW SLOWLY AND WILL PROBABLY BECMOME A SIGNIFICANT PREOCCUPATION WITNIN THE NEXT FEW YEARS. THE COMMUNIST STATES OF INDO-CHINA SHARPLY ATTACHED THE COUP OF OCT, 1976, AND THE "FASCIST MILITARY" CHARACTER OF THE THAI LEADERSHIP. THE VIETNAMESE AND LAOTIAN MEDIA HAVE BEEN NOTABLY MORE RESTRAINED SINCE THE COUP OF OCT 20, 1977, BUT INASMUCH AS THE MILITARY LEADERSHIP BEHIND THE GOVERN-MENT IS UNCHANGED, THE UNDERLYING HOSTILITY OF THEIR VIEWS MUST BE ASSUMED. THE RADIO STATION OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF THAILAND, "VOICE OF THE PEOPLE OF THAILANDN"

HAS CONTINUED TO MAKE ATTACHDS ON THE "SA-NGAT WARLORD CLIQUE" SINCE THE OCT 20 COUP, AND THE COMMUNIST STATES OF INDO-CHINA WILL PROBABLY FIND IT IMPOSSIBLE TO WITH-HOLD SUPPORT FROM THE COMMUNIST INSURGENCY IN THAILAND, IF, INDEED, THEY HAVE MUCH INTEREST IN DOING SO. CONSEQUENTLY, IN THE LONG RUN BASIC IMPROVEMENT IN THAI RELATIONS WITH THE COMMUNIST STATES WILL BE DIFFICULT IF NOT IMPOSSIBLE TO ACHIEVE, ALTHOUGH THE KRIANGSAK GOVERNMENT HAS SET THIS AS A MAJOR OBJECTIVE.

D) OPENING THE POLITICAL SYSTEM: WHILE THE THANIN CABINET WAS OVERTHROWN WITH FEW REGRETS EXPRESSED WITHIN THILAND, IT WAS NOT RPT NOT THANIN WHO ENDED THE DEMOCRATIC EXPERIMENT OF 1976 BUT RATHER THE THAI MILITARY WHO NOW CONSTITUTE THE NATIONAL POLICY COUNCIL. BY PROMISING GENERAL ELECTIONS IN 1978 OR IN THE FIRST PART OF 1979 THE MILITARY GROUP HAS AROUSED EXPECTATIONS WHICH IT WILL FIND DIFFICULT TO DISAPPOINT. AT THE SAME TIME FEW THAI CIVILIAN LEADERS SHOW MUCH ENTHUSIASM FOR THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS, AS PRACTICED IN CONFIDENTIAL

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THE PAST. MANY RELATIVELY LIBERAL THAI LEADERS FOUND THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS, AS EXPERIENCED BETWEEN 1973 AND 1976, TO BE TOO DISORDERLY AND UNDISCIPLINED FOR THE ESSENTIALLY CONSERVATIVE SOCIETY OF THAILAND AND FOR COPING WITH THE COUNTRY'S PROBLEMS. UNQTE O'DONOHUE

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11. US INTERESTS: DESPITE PROBLEM AREAS NOTED ABOVE, NEITHER US OBJECTIVES NOR INTERESTS ARE THREATENED BY THE CHANGE IN THE THAI GOVERNMENT. THE KRIANGSAK GOVERNMENT IS COMMITTED TO GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES. US ECONOMIC OBJECTIVES MAY BE BETTER SERVED UNDER THE NEW GOVERNMENT THAN UNDER THE THANIN CABINET. PRIME MINISTER KRIANGSAK MAY BE PREPARED TO INTERVENT MORE FORCEFULLY TO RESOLVE SOME OF THE VETTY BUT ANNOYING PROBLEMS THAT HAVE HAMPERED AMERICAN BUSINESSMEN IN THAILAND. IN A MORE SIGNIFICANT WAY WE MAY PRESS THE EXPLOITATION OF THAI GAS RESERVES. IF THESE ARE EXPLOITED QUICKLY, THEY COULD BE THE FOUNDATION FOR A MAJOR NEW PHASE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, BUILDING CONFIDENCE IN THE FUTURE, RELIEVING UNEMPLOYMENT, AND PROVIDING THE SINEWS FOR A GENERALLY STRONGER THAILAND.

12. ON HUMAN RIGHTS KRIANGSAK HAS APPRECIATED THE FACT THAT THE PREVIOUS PRACTICE OF ARRESTING PERSONS JUDGED CONFIDENTIAL

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BY THE AUTHORITIES BE BE DANGEROUS TO SOCIETY REALLY CONTRIBUTES LITTLE TO THAI INTERNAL SECURITY BUT, ON THE CONTRARY, DAMAGES THAILAND'S IMAGE ABROAD. IN A COMMENT TO THE PRESS NOV 19 KRIANGSAK HELD OUT THE POSSIBILITY OF A RELEASE OF "POLITICAL PRISONERS" TO MARK THE KING'S BIRTHDAY, DEC 5. A MORE SUPPLE POLICY TOWARD THE THAI PRESS, COUPLED WITH GENERAL ELECTIONS IN 1978 OR EARLY 1979, WILL FURTHER IMPROVE THE THAI IMAGE, EVEN IF THAILAND DOES NOT FULLY RETURN TO THE "DEMOCRATIC EXPERIMENT" OF 1973-76.

13. THE COMMITMENT OF THE THANIN GOVERNMENT TO THE STRUGGLE AGAINST THE ILLICIT NARCOTICS TRAFFIC WAS CLEAR, AND THAI PERFORMANCE IN THIS REGARD HAS BEEN ENCOURAGING IN THE RECENT PAST. WHILE IT IS STILL EARLY IN THE GAME, KRIANGSAK HAS DEMONSTRATED HIS SENSITIVITY TO THIS PROBLEM AND HAS PUBLICLY RESTATED THE COMMITMENT OF HIS GOVERNMENT ON THIS ISSUE. WE WILL WAIT TO BETTER ASSESS ITS PERFORMANCE. MEANWHILE, COOPERATIVE RELATIONSHIPS PREVIOUSLY ESTABLISHED BETWEEN THE MISSION AND THE ROYAL THAI GOVERNMENT IN THE NARCOTICS FIELD ARE FUNCTIONING WELL.

14. LIKE ITS PREDECESSORS, THE KRIANGSAK GOVERNMENT IS RESIGNED TO A LIMITED US SECURITY ROLE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA. HOWEVER, WE ARE ON NOTICE FROM SENIOR FIGURES OF THE THAI SUPREME COMMAND THAT THAILAND INTENDS TO PURCHASE SUBSTANTIAL QUANTITIES OF MILITARY EQUIPMENT FROM THE US, USING BOTH CASE PURCHASES AND WHAT THEY HOPE WILL BE MORE SUBSTANTIAL FMS CREDITS. IF THAILAND IS UNABLE TO MAKE SUCH PURCHASES, BECAUSE OF US LIMITATIONS ON EXPORTS OF MILITARY EQUIPMENT, THAILAND WILL TURN ELSEWHERE, AND US RELATIONS WITH THAILAND
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WILL BECOME MORE DISTANT, THOUGH STILL PROBABLY CORDIAL.

15. CONCLUSIONS: THE EMERGENCE OF A CABINET UNDER THE DIRECT LEADERSHIP OF A MAJOR MILITARY FIGURE RE-ASSERTS A LONG ESTABLISHED PATTERN. KRIANGSAK IS NOT AS POWERFUL A MILITARY FIGURE AS MANY OF HIS PREDECESSORS AND PROBABLY DOES NOT AT THIS POINT HAVE AS FIRM A GRIP ON POWER AS THEY DID. HE WILL SEEK TO MAINTAIN HIS POSITION BY SKILLFUL MANEUVERING, A TASK FOR WHICH HE HAS DEMONSTRATED CONSIDERABLE SKILL OVER THE YEARS. HE HAS A CABINET OF CONSIDERABLE CAPACITY TO WORK WITH, A BROAD PUBLIC ACCEPTANCE OF HIM AS PRIME MINISTER, AND AN APPARENT DETERMINATION TO MOVE QUICKLY AND FORCEFULLY ON A RANGE OF SECURITY, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, AND NARCOTICS PROBLEMS.
O'DONOHUE

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NNN

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL STABILITY, CENTRAL GOVERNMENT
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 21-Nov-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977BANGKO30499
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770430-1287
Format: TEL
From: BANGKOK
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19771137/aaaabeuo.tel
Line Count: 581
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 0b4f3e15-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 11
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 BANGKOK 30105
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 22-Feb-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 512255
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT IN THAILAND: DEVELOPMENTS AND PROSPECTS
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, TH
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/0b4f3e15-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009